DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 644 JC 960 398

AUTHOR Miller, Hal M.
TITLE Trustee Relationships.
PUB DATE Jun 96
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Association of Community College Trustees Southern/Northeast Region Seminar (Greensboro, NC, June 6-8, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; Administrator Role; *Board Administrator Relationship; *College Administration; Community Colleges; Governance; *Governing Boards; Politics of Education; *Trustees; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS North Carolina; *Trustee Responsibility; *Trustee Role

ABSTRACT

As representatives of their college and in working with the college community, community college trustees enter into numerous relationships, each of which has associated roles and responsibilities. Responsibilities of the board chairperson, for example, include working with the president to set meeting agenda, appointing committee members, serving as the official spokesperson for the board, overseeing other trustees, providing counsel for the president, and initiating periodic board evaluations. In addition, trustees in many colleges employ or appoint the college president and it is important that a friendly trustee-president relationship exist. With respect to trustees' relationships with college administrative staff and faculty, the fundamental responsibility of the board is to provide them with adequate policies, rules, and regulations for the effective operation of the institution. Faculty and staff, for their part, are directly responsible to the president and should conduct their business with the board through the president. While the role of state governing boards differs, in North Carolina the state board has full authority to adopt all policies, regulations, and standards deemed necessary for the operation of the system but traditionally grants maximum autonomy to the colleges. In North Carolina, individual trustees have limited direct communication with state-level administrators but are the most powerful group of lobbyists, advocates, and public relations professionals that community colleges have in working with the State Assembly and Congress. (TGI)

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ED 395 644

Trustee Relationships

By

Hal M. Miller
North Carolina Community College System

Paper presented at the Association of Community College Trustees Southern/Northeast Region Seminar (Greensboro, NC, June 6-8, 1996).

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TRUSTEE RELATIONSHIPS

Hal M. Miller
Director of Governmental Affairs
North Carolina Community College System

When you assumed the office of trustee, your relationship with persons who are associated with or have an interest in your community college made a dramatic change. You found yourself looking at the college from a different perspective. You now represent the college, not yourself, and your decisions must be made accordingly. And, once a decision is made by the Board, you are obligated to support it whether you agree with it or not.

My charge today is to talk with you about your relationship with persons with whom you will be in contact on a regular basis.

CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

A chairperson is or should be elected because he/she possesses leadership ability, knows how to work with people, how to solve problems, and how to delegate responsibility and authority. The chairperson is the one who interacts most with the college president and who sets the tone for board operations.

These are some of the major responsibilities of the chairperson:

Establish the Agenda for Meetings: The chairperson works closely with the college president to set the agenda. The board should establish a policy outlining procedures for individual board members requesting or suggesting items for the board's consideration.

Appoint Committee Members: The chairperson appoints members to all committees, and frequently serves as an ex officio member of all committees. This gives the chairperson a better insight into what is going on in the college.

Official Spokesperson: The chairperson serves as the official spokesperson for the board, unless the board officially authorizes another member. This is sometimes done when a member is chairperson of a committee that is working on a specific project (**for example: building construction or presidential search**). A board member should never arbitrarily act as the official spokesperson without authority from the board or board chairperson.

Overseer: The chairperson should consult with other trustees who are not

fulfilling their responsibilities, or who are violating the bylaws, policies, and practices.

Counselor: The chairperson counsels with the president about problems or concerns.

Evaluator: The chairperson initiates periodic board evaluation of the president and of the board, itself.

PRESIDENT

The president, in many community college systems, is employed by the college board of trustees and serves either on contract or at the pleasure of the board. All business of the college should be conducted between the board and the president. There should never be more than one chief executive directly responsible

to the board. And, no individual board member should attempt to conduct official business with the president without the approval of the full board.

If the president is to function as a competent leader and CEO of the institution, a mutual, friendly president-trustee relationship must exist. While there should be a general understanding that the board will accept advice from all sources, the advice should be communicated through the president.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, FACULTY, AND STUDENTS

The administrative staff and faculty of the institution are directly responsible to the president and should conduct their business with the board through the president. Any attempts to circumvent the proper chain of

command will weaken the institution and create division. The most important service the staff and faculty can provide to the board is that of understanding and supporting the role of the institution. A fundamental responsibility of the board is to provide the staff and faculty with adequate policies, rules, and regulations for the efficient and effective operation of the institution. Trustees, administrative staff, and faculty relationships will then be strengthened by the president if he/she provides a satisfactory channel of communication to the trustees.

STATE GOVERNING OR COORDINATING BOARD

States differ in the governance structure of their community colleges. In North Carolina, the law gives the State Board of Community Colleges full authority to adopt

all policies, regulations, and standards it deems necessary for the operation of the system and to establish the state Community College System Office as the staff to administer its policies, etc. The State Board has traditionally granted maximum autonomy to each of the community colleges to operate the colleges. The State Board has reserved for itself such things as adoption of rules and regulations for distribution of state-level funds, approval of educational programs, purchase of land, construction of buildings, and approval of community college presidents selected by local boards of trustees.

In North Carolina, the State Board involves trustees and presidents during Board committee meetings and in developing the budget request for the General Assembly. This year a coalition of the State Board, the Trustees' Association,

the Presidents' Association, and System Office are working jointly to gain additional funding from the General Assembly.

STATE-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION

Interaction with the state-level administrative staff differs from state to state depending on the state-level organizational structure. In North Carolina, the individual trustees have limited direct communication with the state System office. The college presidents are the appropriate ones to discuss adimnistrative, legislative, and other college matters with System officials.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CONGRESS

Trustees are the most powerful group of lobbyists, advocates, and public relations

professionals that community colleges have. They are leaders in their communities where the voting takes place and where county commissioners and local government officials govern. This power can be very effective if used properly and very destructive if used improperly. If funds are appropriated to the colleges through a single state agency, all requests for state funds should be coordinated with that agency. In North Carolina, state funds are appropriated to the State Board of Community Colleges. The State Board, System office staff, trustees and presidents all work together to establish a budget request and all work together in support of the request. Occasionally, a difference of opinion arises in the process and the united front breaks down; however, we make every effort to prevent that from happening.

With Congress, North Carolina trustees are reactive as well as proactive. Trustees communicate with their own congressional delegates about issues of concern and also participate in the ACCT National Legislative Seminar in Washington, DC. In North Carolina, the System Office, the Trustees' Association, and the community colleges work very closely with ACCT and AACC on congressional issues affecting community colleges. ACCT and AACC do an excellent job of keeping trustees informed on major legislation and requesting help when needed from trustees, presidents, and System Office staff in each of the states.

I will stop here and open the floor for comments or questions.